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Spirit Lake Tiyospaye

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Help is on the way!

Tribal Ethics Training

The idea for an ethics training program specific to Indian Country has been in the back of my mind for many years. I first thought of the idea when I was hired as the president of Cankdeska Cikana Community College, and I realized that tribal members really did not have access to due process. Everything hinged on politics. I realized something had to be done to stop, prevent, or at least limit the numerous unethical acts so prevalent throughout the workplace. At the same time, it became clear to me that the lack of courageous and ethical behavior is the primary reason we do not have real "law and order" on my reservation. It did not take me long to comprehend that the value system which allowed unethical acts to flourish was so entrenched I could not fathom a way to bring about change.

Over the past 20 years, I have sat on many different boards and committees: Law and Order Committee, High School Board, Tribal College Board, TERO Board of Commissioners to name a few. For years I listened, observed, took part in and tried to prevent unethical acts such as nepotism and favoritism, lawlessness, embezzlements and theft, chronic absenteeism and tardiness, lies and character assassinations, etc., etc., etc.



Because of the many different leadership positions I held over the years I was fortunate to travel widely throughout Indian Country. Everywhere I went, I have heard the same stories of how unethical and cowardly leadership resulted in corruption, nepotism, favoritism, and plain old wrong decision-making with catastrophic results. However, I also heard as many stories how a tribal worker would commit unethical acts, and then with the help of family, relatives and friends they would intimidate leaders (tribal council members, project directors, supervisor, etc.) into looking the other way.

The good news is help is on the way! Long suffering ethical and courageous tribal members will be glad to hear there is finally an ethics training program designed specifically to address ethical issues in Indian Country. Four years ago, Dr. Annmaria DeMars and I created Spirit Lake
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Help is on the way (continued)

Consulting, and through support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we were able to develop and research ethics education on the reservation, which we called Tribal Leaders With Character. Tribal Leaders With Character was a 6-month pilot project, which we tested on two reservations and its success resulted in the Tribal Leaders Institute (TLI) project. The Tribal Leaders Institute is a two-year project, which, at its completion, will consist of five ethics courses. The first course will introduce ethical issues being faced today on Indian reservations with emphasis being placed in the workplace. Subsequent courses will address ethical issues at different levels of management: the employees, supervisors, administrators and program managers and tribal councils, boards, and committees. All the courses will be based on the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota traditional values of, Perseverance/Fortitude, Courage, Honesty and Generosity.

Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. has a unique insight into the root of the problem. I am an enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation. I was born, raised and reside on the Spirit Lake reservation. I have been a third grade teacher, an Adult Basic Education Instructor, an Even Start Coordinator, Academic Dean and President of our tribal college. Now I own my own company. Although Dr. Annmaria DeMars resigned from the company a couple of months ago to start her own company, The Julia Institute, she remains my primary consultant. Dr. Demars has extensive experience working in Indian Country. She has been a tribal college instructor, evaluator for early childhood, substance abuse and vocational rehabilitation programs, development officer and written grant proposals funded for millions of dollars.

Unlike other organizations whose funding success may depend on "glowing" reports or positive data on tribal programs Spirit Lake Consulting Inc. is 100% owned by me, a Native American who being born, raised and living on an Indian Reservation is committed to addressing the tough issues that



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Help is on the way (continued)

other organizations can't or won't. For example, here is a preview how Courage and Honesty, two of our traditional values will be presented in our training:

"Whether you are an entry-level tribal employee or a tribal council member, Courage and Honesty are two of the most important traits you need to possess. Should you (tribal member) be placed in a leadership position and do not have courage, you will more often than not make cowardly, and unethical decisions instead of courageous and ethical decisions. Your cowardly and unethical decisions will do irreparable harm to tribal members. They might be fired unfairly, they might be denied a house after years on the waiting list or you might hire an unqualified person for a job simply because you do not have the courage to hire the right person. Most importantly, tribal members will see you as a cowardly and unethical leader. Now I don't know about you, but I certainly don't want to be known as cowardly and unethical leader."

In regards to honesty, during TLC Ethics training, I could actually see embarrassment on the faces of many tribal workers when I mentioned some of the more common ethical violations (chronic tardiness/absenteeism, two hour

lunches, falsifying time sheets, etc.), and related it to our value of honesty. I explained how showing up for work late and leaving early, yet still claiming 40 hours of work, is in reality stealing and lying. "Are you comfortable being a liar and a thief?" I would say, and I would see the shame on some faces. As you can see, our training pulls no punches because I believe the situation is so severe, we can't be faint-hearted if we are going to have an impact.

In closing, I believe we are at a point in time, when we Indians can take control of our destiny. Yes, we still face many obstacles but by applying the value of courage, honesty, perseverance/fortitude, and generosity, we can and will prevail. Imagine progress in Indian Country as a car with three tires filled with air and one tire flat. The three tires filled with air represent all the opportunities available to us, education, laws that promote self-determination, income from casinos, political influence from our exploding population and economic development. Now imagine the one flat tire as unethical behavior. Just as a real car cannot go very far or fast with one flat tire similarly our imaginary car, (progress on reservations) will not go far or fast either with one flat tire (unethical behavior) either.

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*Making Life
Better*

Which Reservation Is It?

By Erich Longie

There have been literally hundreds of economic development initiatives started in Indian Country. Dozens are listed on the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development alone.

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied/refs_all.htm

With all this good news why then is poverty, crime, low income, lack of housing etc. still a problem on most Indian Reservations? Because the flaw in Harvard project and similar projects is this, they only see, hear and write about the positive development on Indian Reservations. They meet with only the leaders. The reservation individuals who are participating in these initiatives only speak to them about the positive aspect of the reservation. Many year ago when I first graduated from college and first started paying attention to what our tribal leader were doing and saying I noticed a disconnect between what I knew of the conditions on my reservation and what our tribal leaders were saying publicly. As I began to travel to other reservations I noticed the tribal leaders on those reservations also spoke glowingly of the progress of their reservations. Therefore, I decide to get a "second opinion" when I visited other reservations. After concluding my official business, I would seek out other tribal members and question them. This usually happened at a pow-wow, a bar, a sporting event place, places, and events where the common Indian hung out. Upon

questioning several of these individual, the picture of their reservations was drastically different from their tribal leaders' view of the reservation.

Their view was not so much as disputing the "initiatives" that was happening on their reservation but how they were being administered. They talked about the usual suspects, nepotism, favoritism, cronyism, stealing, misappropriations, embezzlement, and incompetence. Realize these accounts by individuals not in the loop may not be totally accurate, but were not all fabricated lies either. This brings me to my point, despite all the government programs, the casinos, the industries and private business that now exist on Indian Reservations, except for the top 10 – 20% living conditions have not changed. The majority of reservation residents have reaped no benefits. I view this as result of unethical workplace behavior at all levels – the worker, the supervisor, the director/project manager, the governing board member, and the tribal council members.

READ MORE NEXT MONTH about ... the value of honesty versus living a life of a lie, and how TLI will address ethical issues.